
EDITORIAL

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The 18th World Congress of Reading held last year in Auckland, despite its apparent focus on only one aspect of literacy, provided an arena for professional views on wide ranging aspects of literacy to be extrapolated and debated. Staff from the Auckland College of Education contributed to the dialogue through individual presentations or in symposia. This issue of ACE Papers is a collection of papers presented by staff at the Congress.

Literacy is never far from the professional or public gaze internationally, and New Zealand is no exception. Issues in literacy, such as definitions of what constitutes being literate and the merits or demerits of instructional paradigms, are debated frequently in the media instead of in professional forums. In many of these debates the complexity of literacy (or literacies) and its multi faceted nature are not acknowledged. Crises in literacy have been declared in England, Australia and United States with remarkably similar patterns. Solutions have been proposed that do not recognize that there cannot be a 'silver bullet' (Speigel, 1998) which will ensure that a phenomenon such as literacy, a product of cognitive, psychological, linguistic and socio cultural factors, is successful for all learners.

Two years ago the government of the time responded to a perceived literacy crisis in New Zealand. The concern focused on the significant gap between those who were achieving well, generally those for whom English was the language of the home, and those who were not and established a literacy goal that by 2005 all children turning nine would be reading and writing for success. Faced with such a momentous, and ill-defined challenge, a Literacy Taskforce was established with one of its terms of reference to determine 'best practice' to achieve this goal. In addition a number of literacy initiatives were developed to enhance literacy achievement, with a particular focus on raising achievement for children struggling with literacy.

The response of the Ministry of Education, and the New Zealand public, to the current status of literacy and the challenges offered, is described and examined by Libby Limbrick who, commenting on the complexity of literacy, acknowledges any solutions are equally complex. She discusses some of the literacy initiatives that are currently underway and proposes some suggestions for the future.

Spurred by the debate on what constitutes best practice for literacy a symposium on **Perspectives on Best Practice for Literacy development in the New Zealand Classroom** was contributed by staff from the Centre for Language and Languages. This symposium brought together understandings about the nature of literacy in the twenty first century, linguistic and socio-cultural theories and classroom practice to guide learners in our multicultural classrooms. Several of the papers drew on the understanding that to be literate involves being able to undertake a number of roles, either simultaneously or sequentially (Luke 1992). Becoming literate requires the learner to be a code breaker, a participant drawing on culture and experiences, an

effective user of texts for multiple purposes and a critical analyst of what is read and of what is written. While each of these is essential, none are sufficient by themselves. In contrast to earlier narrower and linear views of literacy as 'reading', English in the New Zealand Curriculum acknowledges that oral, and visual language competencies and understandings are significant components of literacy. Supporting this position, Barbara Matthews discusses the importance of a focus on oral and visual language in language programmes, particularly in today's world of multi-modal texts. Furthermore she reminds us that viewing literacy development from constructivist and co-constructivist perspectives, which acknowledge the experiential base of children's learning, therefore must also acknowledge the centrality of oral and visual language in literacy development.

Underlying the debates over instructional practices are differing perceptions of what is meant by 'best practice'. Consequently identifying the challenges to achieving best practice can differ. Jan Keenan in her contribution reported on research that examined classroom teachers' views of the issues that underlie the challenges of 'best practice' in literacy. In **Emergent Reading: Issues from Research and Practice**, Jan first outlines the development of literacy instruction in New Zealand, and then describes some of the issues identified by the Literacy Task Force established by the Government in 1998. She then compares these with the views of classroom teachers. Not surprisingly, the key issues for the classroom teachers were those which impacted on implementation of literacy instruction in schools: for example, class sizes; time to develop effective relationships with home and community; appropriate and sufficient resources to meet the literacy learning needs of diverse children. She advocates that researchers and policy makers listen to the professional voices of teachers if 'best practice for literacy' is to be demonstrated in New Zealand classrooms.

Helen Villers extends the discussion of a co-constructivist view of literacy development, as she looks in depth into one culturally and linguistically diverse Auckland classroom, exploring the viewpoints of learners for whom English is an additional language. Her research report, The Changing Face of Language and Literacy Learning in the Middle Years of the New Zealand Primary School: Can Shared Understandings about the Nature and Purpose of Second Language Acquisition and Literacy Learning Enhance Achievement Outcomes for NESB Students? highlights tensions between pedagogically sound principles that the teacher advocates and implements in her language rich classrooms, and peer pressures on the learners that can emerge.

Similar themes arise in Jill Holt's paper **Personal Narratives Through Drama: Motivation for Reading and Writing**. Drama, she hypothesises enables the learner to construct meaning through drawing on their own cultural experiences: thus liberating the learners' voices within real life contexts and providing powerful reasons for writing, and reading. A whole class involvement in a drama provides a parallel with Bahktin's concept of complex linguistic communities so that, once again, literacy is defined, implicitly, as a complex interrelated phenomenon which draws on multiple roles. However, pivotal to becoming literate is the learners' engagement with their experiences of the world.

The challenges of working with new texts types, such as hypertexts, which are not linear are examined in research reported by Jackie Mason and co-authored by John Roder. In **Realising the Power Within: Literacy Partnerships with Information and Communication Technologies**, they asserts that teachers need not only to know about the features and language of hypertext but be prepared to make shifts in the way they interact with such texts. In the report they describe how children, and teachers, engage in powerful learning experiences as they create hypertexts which have structural, and linguistic complexities unique to non linear texts. Jackie's research, which was the basis of this report, has important implications for all educators as they grapple with the challenges of learning with electronic texts.

In the final paper, **New Zealand Children's Literature (1970 – 2001)**, Wayne Mills reviews the last thirty years of children's literature in New Zealand. Today and for many years past, literacy programmes have placed quality literature at the heart of instruction. The growth of indigenous literature in New Zealand both through educational and trade publishers has meant that today our readers have a wealth of texts, both print and electronic, that relate to and builds on their own culture and experience. Many of the issues examined in the papers of this issue can be related to the place that literature plays in our children's lives.

With the many literacy initiatives being implemented in schools we anticipate that this issue of ACE papers will contribute to the on going dialogue essential if the Ministry goal of successful literacy acquisition is to be achieved for all children.

References

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CONTRIBUTORS

Libby Limbrick is Head of the Centre for Language and Languages and teaches mainly in primary teacher education programmes. She is a member of the Ministry of Education's Literacy Expert and was a member of the government Literacy Taskforce. Libby's dissertation for her doctorate in education was an examination of the reading and language development of profoundly deaf children.

Jill Holt has worked in multicultural Auckland primary and secondary schools for over fifteen years. Jill specialises in Children's Literature, Drama in the Language Programme and Children's Narrative and Self-Narrative. She has just completed a PhD on Children's Published Writing in New Zealand Newspapers.

Jan Keenan is a Senior Lecturer in the Centre for Language and Languages. Jan has a special knowledge of, and is interested in children's literature, reading acquisition, and integrated language programmes. Jan has a Master of Education with a thesis that examined Adult Education.

Jackie Mason is a Senior Lecturer who has taught at all levels of the primary school for 17 years before coming to the Centre of Language and Languages at ACE. Her particular interests are children's writing, children's literature, and information literacy. She completed her Master of Education degree in 1999 with a thesis that examined the influence of hypertext on Year 5 and 6 students' information literacy acquisition.

John Roder has taught across many levels of education, as a teacher of 5 year olds right through to senior secondary school art. Presently he is a senior lecturer and has strong interests in the issues surrounding ICT and literacy. He is currently working with teachers on ICT enhanced curriculum.

Barbara Matthews has a Master's degree in Applied Linguistics and a post graduate diploma in TESSOL. Her interests are in language acquisition, children's literature and teaching English as an Additional Language and as a Foreign Language.

Wayne Mills is a Senior Lecturer in the Centre for Language and Languages and specialises in children's literature. He has a particular interest in boys and their reading. Wayne's M.Ed thesis examined the Reading Habits of Intermediate-Aged Children. Wayne is the President of the Children's Literature Foundation, and was instrumental in establishing the National Literature Quiz for Children.

Helen Villers is a Senior Lecturer in the Centre for Language and Languages. Helen's specialist areas include literacy theory, children's literature and the NESB learner. Helen has recently completed her M.Ed degree. Her thesis examined language and literacy transitions to the English medium classroom made by older, new migrant students who were already literate in their mother tongue.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Centre for Language and Languages wishes to thank the following lecturers and organisations for taking the time to review the papers in this issue.

Pauline Buchanan for 'Drama to Enrich and Centre Children's Written Language'.

Tony Hunt and Marineke Goodwin for 'Realising the Power Within: Literacy Partnerships With Information and Communication Technologies'.

Jackie Mason for 'Oral and Visual Strands in the New Zealand Curriculum: A Guide to Best Practice for Literacy'.

Dr Libby Limbrick and Nola Harvey for 'The changing face of language and literacy learning in the middle years of the New Zealand primary school: Can shared understandings about the nature and purpose of second language acquisition and literacy learning enhance achievement outcomes for NESB students?'

Dr Libby Limbrick for 'Emergent Reading: Issues From Research and Practice'.

Barbara Matthews for 'New Zealand's Response to the Literacy Issues of the 1990's'.

Ohio State University for 'New Zealand's Children's Literature (1970-2001)'.

The Centre for Language and Languages would like to acknowledge the support of the **Auckland College of Education Research Grant Committee** for funding support to present at the 18th World Congress on Reading.

The Centre also wishes to acknowledge contribution of Centre staff, **Pauline Buchanan, Margaret Aikman, John McCaffery**, and ACE colleagues **Helen Dixon** and **Ruth Williams**, to the 18th World Congress on Reading. Unfortunately their papers were not able to be included in this issue of ACE Papers.

The Committee would also like to thank **Dr Libby Limbrick** for final editorial adjustments and **Julie Kleinpaste and Ursula Walters** for providing editorial assistance.